

5. January 2023

Brotherly love

1 Jn 3:11-21

This is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we must love one another, not to be like Cain, who was from the Evil One and murdered his brother. And why did he murder his brother? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's upright. Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you. We are well aware that we have passed over from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love, remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you are well aware that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone is well-off in worldly possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be remaining in him? Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine. This will be the proof that we belong to the truth, and it will convince us in his presence, even if our own feelings condemn us, that God is greater than our feelings and knows all things. My dear friends, if our own feelings do not condemn us, we can be fearless before God.

At the beginning of the year, we continue to listen to the words of the Apostle John. In today's reading, he insistently calls us to fraternal love and gives us to understand that he who does not love has no life; that is to say, he is settled in death.

This statement clearly reminds us that God's motivation in creating and redeeming us was love. Therefore, love is the key, the keynote of our whole existence: it is from God that the full acceptance of our life comes, for it was He who willed that we should exist!

We all know what it is to feel accepted and loved. Under these conditions, we flourish and the best of us comes to the fore. If, on the other hand, we feel a rejection of our existence, we have to constantly struggle not to withdraw into ourselves and harden our hearts. It is also essential that we accept ourselves. God's love will teach us to do so.

We see, then, that life unfolds in love. Likewise, also the spiritual life will be fruitful only to the extent that it shows itself in the works of love, overcoming every form of religious

selfishness. In this very love we begin to see the other person. Indeed, we are called to be "our brother's keeper" (cf. Gen 4:9), in that we must not be indifferent to what happens to him. If our neighbour is in material need and we have the possibility to help him, then it is love that asks us to take the concrete step. If our brethren has an inner need and we are able to comfort him, then we must offer concrete help according to our ability. In any case, we can always pray for other people, and in this way we come to their aid, presenting them to the Lord.

For St. John, love put into practice is the criterion for recognising whether we are of the truth. And indeed it is so! *"Our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine."*

But the Apostle is not only alluding to the concrete acts of love that we are called to practise in view of other people's need. It is about striving to acquire an attitude of love in our whole being. This is why St. John gives us the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave his life for his brothers and sisters. This means that we too are called to put our whole life at the service of God and others.

St. John brings us down to earth when he says: *"Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you."* And we might add that the reason the world hates us is precisely because its works are often evil. Since fraternal love is constantly offended, charity grows cold and death gains more and more ground. This is shown in a very concrete way in the terrible reality of abortion and in all offences against life. The hatred of the world is aroused when Christians, by their witness of life, remind it that God's commandments are valid for all people, and that the coldness of the world is precisely the consequence of the alienation from God.

We are called to give an authentic Christian witness, without being intimidated by the selfishness that we still discover within ourselves and which we must overcome with God's strength; without being intimidated by the world's frequent misunderstanding of true love, even when this misunderstanding turns into enmity. By practising brotherly love, we will bear witness to the Lord outwardly, and thus our conscience will not condemn us, but we will have complete trust in God.